CULTURAL TOURISM IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Western Management Consultants

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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CULTURAL TOURISM IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Executive Summary

Governments throughout North America are beginning to develop a relationship that has existed in Britain and Europe for many years - a strong link between a country's cultural assets and the tourism industry. A healthy dynamic cultural life adds much to the image of cities, acting as a magnet to those deciding on a vacation or convention site. As cultural activities and events are concentrated in the time period referred to in the tourism industry as the "shoulder seasons", an opportunity for promotions that extend the tourism season is created.

Objectives of the Study

The British Columbia Ministry of Tourism sees the promotion of cultural tourism as another way of achieving its major objective of increasing the number of visits, average length of stay and per diem expenditures of travellers in B.C.. In order to gain a better understanding of what kinds of cultural products are available in British Columbia, when they are scheduled and how they are currently marketed and promoted, the Ministry of Tourism retained Western Management Consultants to carry out a survey of cultural organizations throughout the province. The Ministry of Tourism and the consultants were assisted in carrying out the research, by various leading members of the cultural communities in both Vancouver and Victoria.

The Questionnaire/Survey

At the outset of the project, the word "culture" was discussed among various representatives of the cultural community in order to arrive at a

definition to be used in carrying out the survey. It was agreed that "culture" refers to a much broader spectrum of activities than the visual and performing arts and includes, among other things, gardens, historic sites and attractions, museums, festivals and special events, commercial entertainers, craft fairs and antique shops and ethnic communities.

More than 200 organizations throughout the province are involved in activities that fall into this definition of culture. These organizations received questionnaires during the month of April 1986. As of June 30, 1986, 88 questionnaires were returned which is considered an excellent response to a mail out questionnaire.

The survey responses revealed the following major points:

1. Enthusiasm was expressed repeatedly toward the concept of using cultural products to attract tourists. Many organizations indicated a willingness to participate in cooperative promotional ventures. They welcome the efforts of the Ministry of Tourism in initiating a cultural tourism research project.

2. In general, the calendar of cultural events is becoming increasingly full during the September through April period but remains relatively sparse from May through August in Vancouver and Victoria. In other areas of the province, cultural organizations rely heavily on tourist traffic in July and August with little activity occurring during the shoulder season.

3. A particularly heavy concentration of special events, performances etc. is scheduled during December in Vancouver and to a lesser extent, in Victoria. Some gardens and museums in Vancouver experience their heaviest attendance during December.

4. Timing and scheduling of events is very often linked to availability of funding and facilities and not necessarily to market demand.

5. All cultural organizations appear to have excess capacity in the form of unsold tickets or ability to handle increased attendance.

6. Most cultural organizations do not have hard data available regarding the characteristics of their audiences although many expressed a desire to collect such data. Without this data, most organizations are unable to determine to what extent their organizations are attracting tourists.

7. Very few cultural organizations spend marketing dollars to reach audiences outside their local area. Marketing budgets are primarily directed at reaching the existing audiences or members of each organization.

8. Many organizations recognize that the tourism industry represents a valuable marketing opportunity but have not committed the time nor the budget, individually, to develop a marketing relationship with the tourism industry.

9) A growing number of cultural organizations in both Vancouver and Victoria are expressing an interest in pooling marketing expertise and a number of organizations have already begun to pool their resources to produce promotional literature and to cooperate on other kinds of joint promotional projects.

10) Improving access to information and tickets for tourists was a concern expressed by many organizations in Vancouver. A highly visible tourist information centre which includes a ticket outlet, comprehensive, frequently updated calendars of events and arts hotlines were ideas mentioned on the questionnaire.

11) Responses to the questionnaire indicated that there are currently a number of good opportunities to improve and strengthen existing cultural tourism products and to develop new ones. Cultural organizations in the urban areas are making plans to schedule more events and activities during the summer months in response to the tourism industry. Cultural events and activities in other regions of the province which are already dependent on the tourist industry have the potential to attract many more tourists if they become fully integrated in the tourism marketing strategies in those regions.

CONCLUSIONS

In addition to carrying out the questionnaire survey, Western Management Consultants met with representatives from 30 cultural organizations

in Vancouver and Victoria to discuss their views with respect to the development of cultural tourism. These interviews together with the results of the questionnaire have clarified the opportunity that exists to integrate cultural products in tourism marketing strategies throughout the province, but particularly in Vancouver and Victoria.

The major conclusion that can be drawn is that the timing is right for the development of the link between the cultural and tourism industries. A substantial number of high quality, unique cultural products exist in Vancouver and Victoria during the months of September through June, the period during which the tourism industry has excess capacity. Cultural organizations throughout the province have demonstrated a high degree of enthusiasm toward the prospects of working with the tourism industry to develop new audiences for their activities and events.

Cultural Products

1. To be marketed successfully with the tourism industry, cultural products must be high in quality, targetted at identifiable segments of the population in the major tourism markets, scheduled with sufficient lead time to allow development of promotions and repetitive in nature.

2. Although every region of the province has a number of cultural products meeting the above criteria, there is a heavy concentration of these products in Vancouver and Victoria during the shoulder seasons.

3. Cultural products located outside of urban areas are scheduled primarily during the summer months and are dependent on the volume of tourist traffic in that particular region.

4. Cultural products throughout the province have additional capacity in terms of unsold tickets or ability to increase attendance.

Marketing Organizations

1. The City of Victoria, each of the nine tourism regions of the province and many other towns have tourism marketing organizations in place that are capable of creating the link between the tourism industry and cultural products. Tourism Victoria has recently been restructured to include strong representation from the city's cultural organizations.

2. Most of the cultural organizations interviewed in Vancouver recognize that they cannot make the desired connection to the tourism industry individually. They need to cooperate with a tourism marketing body that can incorporate their ideas and initiatives into an overall tourism marketing strategy.

   The City of Vancouver currently lacks an organizational structure to develop the link between the city's many cultural products and the tourism industry. Without such an organization, cultural organizations will continue to have difficulty in jointly promoting their products with the tourism industry.

Development of Marketing Strategies

1. Cultural organizations generally lack sufficient data regarding their audiences to accurately target either local or tourist audiences. Many organizations have expressed an interest in collecting such data and generally support the idea of a coordinated audience survey.

2. An opportunity exists for the Ministry of Tourism to develop an overall creative theme for marketing British Columbia's wide variety of existing cultural products. Within the framework of a creative theme, cultural products can promote themselves individually or jointly.

3. Cultural organizations are ready and willing to cooperate in creating and promoting packages with the local tourism industry but will need marketing direction and assistance.

4. There is currently a lack of good quality promotional material reflecting the variety and quality of cultural products in the province. Cultural organizations want to cooperate in the production of high quality films, videos and other kinds of promotional materials for use at trade shows, familiarization tours, travel writers etc.

5. While the current marketing budgets of cultural organizations are generally limited, there is a growing recognition that some portions of these budgets can be pooled to achieve a greater impact in reaching both local and tourist audiences. Cooperative marketing needs to be further developed within the cultural industry and between cultural and tourism organizations.

Market Supports

1. There is an opportunity to implement cultural tourism market supports and services which would make it easier for customers to purchase cultural products. Examples of market supports and services include:

   - Highly visible, information centres capable of providing accurate and timely information on all cultural activities and points of interest.

   - Improved accessibility for tourists to tickets for cultural events and activities. Ticket centres incorporated in information centres and widely publicized and accessible ticket reservation phone lines have been suggested.

   - Telephone information "hot lines" providing advice and direction to cultural activities, food and beverage facilities, parking etc.

   - Comprehensive, frequently updated calendars of events listing all entertainment and recreational activities to be distributed in hotels, restaurants, transportation terminals, information centres, tourist and cultural attractions.

2. There is work to be done between the cultural and tourism industries to educate one another and to explore the benefits of working together in the development of cultural tourism.

Cultural Product Development Opportunities

1. Development of any additional cultural products in Vancouver and Victoria should be primarily focussed on the summer months when the calendar of cultural events in the two cities is relatively sparse. Any development during the shoulder season should make use of existing events as the basis for larger events and promotions.

2. Cultural product development in the nine tourism regions should focus on strengthening the products of existing organizations and special events which take place during the tourist season.

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